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SUBJECT: CHILD LABOR IN JALISCO: CRISIS BUT VERY LITTLE ACTION

¶1. SUMMARY: Jalisco suffers from high rates of child labor including the sexual exploitation of children. A recent symposium and UN visit has highlighted the problem, but has so far not resulted in any policy changes or new government initiatives. A local union is working to promote action on this issue. END SUMMARY.

Grim Statistics:

¶2. Child labor is a serious problem in the western Mexican state of Jalisco. Although the exact number of workers is unknown, according to a study by the Federal Secretariat of Labor (STPS) and the National Institute for Statistics, Geography, and Information Technology (INEGI), Jalisco is one of the five states within Mexico with the highest rates of child labor. The majority of these children work in the agricultural sector, grocery stores (as baggers for tips), family/small businesses and factories, and on the streets cleaning windshields and selling items. There is also a considerable number of children involved in commercial sexual exploitation, especially in the beach resort town of Puerto Vallarta. The head of the Jalisco state office of the child welfare agency (DIF) indicated that one study found that as many as 600 children are sexually exploited laborers.

Lack of Action:

¶3. In commemoration of the June 12, World Day Against Child Labor, the Jalisco state government held the third annual symposium on child labor. The event brought together interested parties, but did not result in a single concrete proposal to combat the problem. The recent visit of Juan Miguel Petit, UN Special Representative for the Fight Against the Sale and Prostitution of Children and Child Pornography also highlighted the problem of the sexual forms of child labor. Although this high profile visit resulted in a report to be presented to the UN and GOM, there has been no new state policy developed to deal with child labor.

¶4. Currently, Jalisco DIF assists 3,465 child laborers. The agency uses a singular approach to combat child labor and offers educational scholarships and food grants to convince children and their families to end the child's work. In 2004, there was a pilot program through the cooperation of the International Labor Organization, STPS, and Jalisco DIF that worked specifically on the problem of sexually exploited children. This program has ended and even though the ILO wants to restart the program, the federal government has yet to act. Thus, there is no date for the re-start of the program.

The CROC Steps Forward:

15. Outside of the government, the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC) in Jalisco, the state level organization of one of the major national unions, has recently created a committee that hopes to work with private and public organizations to combat the sexual exploitation of children. This new committee includes a councilman from the Guadalajara municipal government. This effort by the CROC in Jalisco is a local example of what the union is attempting to do nationally in its efforts to deal with this serious problem. children.

COMMENT: Positive Change Will be Slow

16. There is little prospect in the short term for meaningful action by the state government on child labor and/or the sexual exploitation of children. Recent events have highlighted the problem, but the lack of a tangible response is disturbing. The principal social service agency, DIF, is weak, underfunded, and decentralized. The state government runs its own DIF offices while several medium and large cities manage their own DIF agencies at the municipal level. There is no indication of a coordinated effort between the different offices. At least on the local level, the most promising hope for change appears to be the CROC's initiative, which might be able to bring together both the private and public sectors to jump-start an effective program against child labor.

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